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THE SEA WORLD POETS

BY

HERBERT S. HALL.

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THE SEA WORLD WAITS

A Book of Poems

BY
HERBERT J. HALL



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1922

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PART I

The Sea World Waits

THE SEA WORLD WAITS

The ocean pauses, will there be storm or sun—
The morning mists hang low, the long seas ply
Their even course. Half tide, the great gulls cry,
Half tide, half tide—and slowly, one by one
They dip and ride the waves, smooth waves that run
Like liquid silver dulled, smooth waves that die
Where vague and low the distant islands lie,
Lean ribbed islands, bleak and bare and dun.

Who knows what fate hangs now upon the shift
The casual turn of wind? Heavy and gray
And timelesss all the sea world waits until—
Unnoticed, straight above, a cloudy rift
Comes blue, closes, widens—wins the day—
The light burns through. The sun god has his will.

THE ISLAND

Spray drenched ledges, brown as the weeds are brown,
White ridged as foam is white,—touched with green
Of bay—low spreading oaks and pines that lean
As the wind wills—tall cliffs plunging down and down
To lightless depths of sea that hold and drown;
And here behind their sheltering rock-carved screen
A few gray houses, low and patched and mean,—
Lonely and still—the little fisher town—

Lost in the sea, remote and bleak and still,
The last brave outpost of the world of men.
Here have I come, here shall all striving cease—
My work is done—here shall I have my fill
Of silence. Give me your perfect quiet then,
Dream Island, give me at last your own great peace.

IN SOLITUDE

Here in still island solitude the way,
Of thought, the ways of feeling, change and clear.
With ocean's depth and mystery so near,
The haste, the restlessness of living, stay
Their course. Confusion and the heavy sway
Of doubt, the reign of shadow-haunted fear,
Like thinning mist-clouds, lift and disappear
In clarity of dawn and closing day.

Here limits vanish and I seem to know
Something of largeness—call it what you will,
Faith, insight—these the wide sea gives;
They come unbidden with the ebb and flow
Of many waters, fill my heart until
The spirit that was dead within me lives.

MIRAGE

The great sea dreams fantastic dreams today,
Sun magic rules the water and the sky
And who shall say what lands are those that lie
Along the blurred horizon, dim and gray.
Ships that sailed long since a world away
Come back again at last, go drifting by—
Dreams, sea dreams that live awhile and die—
Vain and idle fancies—who shall say.

Fail now across the shining water planes
The cries of sailors and the ghostly sound
Of deep sea chanteys; vaguely far and tall
The towers of enchanted islands, fanes
And palaces, grow dim; outward bound
Once more the dream ships pass beyond recall.

CALM

Deep blue and motionless, the wide sea blends
With sky and cloud till sea and sky are one,
One with the heavy air and with the sun :
Rarely a far bright surface turns and sends
A shoreward flash ; the shimmering distance bends
And wavers with long lines of heat that run
Almost invisible. The day begun
In calm, in night of calm, unchanging ends.

Too prodigal the warm sun-minted gold,
Too calm the sea. The ancient menace sleeps
But lightly through the still midsummer day.
Have care, have care, the ocean's depths are cold,
Beware the night, the chill of danger creeps.
Far in the west the broad heat lightnings play.

SPRING

With greenness unbelievable the spring
Touches the island valleys. Day by day
The planes of ocean soften and the gray
Old rocks grow warm. The long bright waves up-fling
Their sudden showers. High on easy wing
The white gulls soar. Fickle winds of May
Over the storm-worn granite hilltops play—
Who shall betray their gentle murmuring?

Who shall betray these soft, peace-breathing airs—
Who shall remember? Even now the light
Grows dim—the quick recession of a wave
Drops for a space the old disguise and bares
The sharp edged reef where cold and black as night
Yawns a deep cavern like an open grave.

THE STORM

Death, white death in the rush of the roaring gale,
White arms of death among the crouching rocks:
The lifted ocean rises, rises, locks
The island in one fierce embrace—they fail—
The strong defences fail—whole seas assail
The crumbling land. Mighty granite blocks
Uplifted, leap and roll in tumbling flocks.
Death, white death and the storm's unceasing wail.

Death, still death. O God of crashing storm,
What is this limp and lifeless thing that lies
Undone, this man whose last defiant breath
Calls on Thy name, this man still limp and warm,
This man who struggles to the last and dies,
Who triumphs in the very arms of death?

FOG

The sea gives up its unremembered dead—
They walk the shore, they crown the cliffs, they stand
On every cape and pinnacle of land.
Each quiet cove and inlet feels their tread.
Up from the darkness of the ocean's bed
Obedient to a stern, low voiced command,
At the wavering beck of a pale, uplifted hand
They come, the silent hosts of fear and dread.

We feel their presence in the dripping cloud;
Their touch is on our foreheads, over all
The sunlit world the darkening vapors sail—
This is their day, the drifting sea wraiths crowd
Into our lives, breathless we hear their call
And stout indeed the heart that does not quail.

SIRENS

Calling, singing, calling through the rain—
Siren voices, strong, insistent, near,
Then far and failing with the fall and veer
Of cold sea wind. Silence—and again
The calling—shall the siren song be vain?
Above the noise of waters, faint and clear:—
“This helmsman, this way, have no fear.”
Clearing sea mists bear the soft refrain.

Cordage pearled with fog and sails adrip,
High bows lifting to the rain-white swell—
A gliding spectre feels her way along—
Shrouded for her grave, the freighted ship.
Shrouded for her grave? The cry “All’s well”
Comes back to mock the distant siren song.

MEMORIES

Poignant, grief laden, chill and comfortless
How the old memories come flooding back,
Known sins, known weaknesses and all the lack
Of brave accomplishment, the consciousness
Of heavy wrong that stands without redress,
That death will come before the hanging slack
Can be made taut, before the dull and black
Will shine again or trouble cease to press.

Yet the blue seas their sloping shores enfold,
The spreading waters warm beneath the sun,
Peace, beauty, power, these abide—
To shame me in my littleness; the bold
Hard ledges mock, and gleaming ripples run
Lightly above the steady rising tide.

TRIUMPH

All, all is taken from me, all—
I know but heavy sorrow and the long
Insistent pain that comes of hopeless wrong.
The heavens that were love and beauty fall—
Joy and laughter are beyond recall,
Yet shall the barren places hear my song,
Yet shall the courage of my faith be strong,
Unmoved, resistant like a great sea wall.

For in the barrenness of life I feel
A dignity and greatness that can be
Naught but the hand of God. Cold and bare
The sloping shores, merciless as steel
The hard flat surface of the circling sea—
The more life mocks at me the more I dare.

CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE

Rough bound on every hand by walls of stone,
Held prisoner by a sea that never sleeps,
Bowed in a dreary wailing wind that sweeps
The warmth and comfort out of life, alone
I walk these island paths; what shall atone
For hard gray walls and grim, death-guarded keeps,
For cold that from the icy water creeps
Into the shrinking marrow of the bone.

Not less than freedom is the full return
For bondage; I must force with bleeding hands
The bonds that hold me; up the winding stair
Of this earth dungeon I shall leap to learn
The exaltation of a wide command,
The spreading sea, the boundless fields of air.

THE WORD

The morning sunlight like a cloth of gold
Sparkles upon the sea. A fresh wind takes
The rising waves, from roughening water shakes
The flying whitecaps. Swiftly, fold on fold
The long blue rollers, deep and bright and cold,
Pass the tall headlands. All the sea world wakes—
A new creation with the sunrise breaks—
A keen new world for one grown gray and old.

So is the morning, so the glowing sun.
Even the hollows of the dark sea caves
Far in the depths of their eternal night
Feel the faint stirring of the day begun.
Above the mighty concourse of the waves
God speaks the word again and there is light.

PRAYER

Long days of island stillness, nights that fill
The firmament with blazing stars—the frail
Soft wonder of the moon—white clouds that sail
Like battle fleets of old—the golden thrill
Of sunrise mounting, mounting high until
The last faint glimmers of the planets fail.
What have these things to do with that old tale
Of heaven and an all pervading Will?

With half closed eyes I let the strong light in,
I breathe the amazing freshness of the day,
I reach out slowly with a groping hand:—
“God of the sea,” the whispered words begin
Their faltering prayer, “show me, show me the way,
Almost I see, almost I understand.”

TRUTH

What if I gaze at evening from an height
And see the colors of the world grow dim—
The ocean's limitless horizon rim
Lost in the trailing shadows of the night.
The hard reefs in the pale, uncertain light
Melt in their ghostly froth and where were grim
Sea walls of stone, appear at evening's whim
Thin, trellised films of shadow tissue slight.

Nothing is real, the ocean at my feet
Has all the airy depths of cloudless skies.
No more are time and space, whatever seems
Is true. In boundless solitude I greet
The night of mystery, the truth that lies
Deep hidden in the quiet land of dreams.

THE VOICE

Speak not, be still, the smallest human sound
Would bring from every side an hundred more
To rend the silence with their echo roar.
The very heart, the restless heart is bound
In silence. Here within this rocky mound—
This island in midsea—the slender core
Of stillness lies and all the sunlit shore
Dreams in a spell of quiet—wide, profound.

Out of the deep a sigh, a murmur grows ;
A crystal voicing of the ocean's breath
Comes and is gone—through every cove and bend
The word is passed along, along it flows—
The sea's slow commenting on life and death—
Voice of the beginning and the end.

THE FUTURE

Time halts here—time that knows the glare
Of mid-day suns, the mist-hung fields of dawn,
Long tranquil afternoons and the forlorn
Sweet hours of dusk—time that knows breaking care,
Long days of struggle, brave resolve, the wear
And strain of life, the aching love and scorn.
Time halts—a great obscuring veil is drawn
Across the past, leaving oblivion there.

Oblivion—the long unfolding done—
Time halts a moment's space and bids me stand
Waiting, thoughtful, silent and alone—
The old days dead, the future scarce begun.
A wave breaks hollow on the shining sand,
I turn and face again the great unknown.

THE LINE

Today I have seen
A clear dividing line
Drawn sharp between
The winter and the spring.
Snow is on the marshes
And on all the hills
Down to the very margin of the sea.
There is the line
And there begins the spring.
Soft blue as ever yet in May,
Wide fields of ocean, misty blue,
Stretch on and on—
Into the bending sky.

FIRE ON THE BEACH IN WINTER

In the waste of snow
The drift-wood smokes and kindles,
Turns to flame,
Heat and cold commingle,
Strive for mastery.
The flame is dull against the snow,
It glows against the gray sea—
The smoke has color of the sea.
The round, black rimmed hole in the snow
Is like a window into an inner world of fire

The salt edge of the sea
Comes creeping, creeping
Over the icy shingle.
The keen salt edge of the sea—
To quench the world of fire.

MOON PATH

The moon path is a net of silver fishes,
Whirling, twisting, leaping at their play.
I draw the net in slowly, carefully—
It is strangely light—
I might have known the slender cords would break.

RAIN AT SEA

A million little circling water rings,
A million tiny leaping dots of white
Trouble the smoothness of the flattened sea.
A new delight of freshness fills the air,
A wordless whisper—and the shower has passed.

SUNRISE

At early dawn the fisher fleet
Lay still and gray and cold
As the ghost gray sea:—
A rose red flush came up the sky,
The masts were burnished gold
With sails of rose;—
A flare of flame as broad as the moon
Burned through the barrier clouds
A path of fire;—
The masts charred black and the limp sails hung
As dark as the darkened shrouds
Across the sun.

HARBOR WATER

Green, opaque,
Like a huge inlay of glass
The harbor water lies—
Reflecting nothing;
Giving back instead
At odd, uneven intervals,
A quick, blind glare of sun.

SUNLIGHT

Green and gold the waters play
All across the wind-swept bay.
Never trail of shadow there,
Green and gold the waters wear—
Green and gold and gray.

Life and light possess the day,
Near and distant, all the way.
What is shadow, what is care?
Green and gold the waters wear—
Green and gold and gray.

THE WAVE

Out of the deep water
Into the shoal water
Breaking reflections of clouds and sky—
Into the still water
Silently, coolly,
Came the smooth roll of a wave.

Into the weed tangle
Lifting, floating,
Over the dull rocks leaving them bright—
Under the cliff's edge
Murmuring, sighing,
Flowed and was ended—the wave.

LEST THE GREAT SEA BE LONELY

Lest the great sea be lonely, lest it fear,
Recede and dwindle in the lengthening night—
The low moon thin and pale and warped and sere
Hangs out at last her yellow lantern light.

PART II

Theme

THEME

The simple theme has haunted me for days
With quiet, slow insistence.
In all my dreams
The brave elaborations rise and fall
Timed to a quiet breathing.

And may the God of all musicians give to me
The strange poetic sureness
That can take
Out of the formless world of air and sun
A music that has lived there always
But unknown, unheard, undreamed,
A music that shall speak with surer tongue
Than all the lovely words that have been spoken.

Come to me, soul of viol,
Soul of harp,
Crooning of mellow tubes,
Come to me and let your voices flow
In magic modulations—
Come to me rhythm and balance
You are my inner life, my knowledge.
Now shall the song be made—
Song of my brain
Song of the air and sun,
Song of sweet life and living
Voice of the silent world.

THE OLD SYMPHONY

Old music lives again today.
These violins and 'cellos, flutes and horns,
Are old, old instruments.
The great piano has become
A tinkling harpsichord—
The leader sits before it—
Raises a free hand
Releasing so
The first notes of the ancient symphony.
On, on the measures flow
Fresh and sweet and true—
They have not matched it in these later days.
Andante con moto,
Adagio, tripping *scherzo*,
Allegro maestro assai—
Groping, searching,
Dancing, jesting,
Triumphing at last.

The white haired leader rises slowly,
Bows with stately grace,
Then as fades a dream
Grows dim
And is no more.

BASS VIOL

Shedding gold pollen like a giant bee
The squat bow sweeps across the viol's face—
Deep sounds, cross cuts of music, meaning naught
Yet serving all—the true support, the bass.
Down, down the viol slides to depths below
All sound—to depths where silence lies unmoved.

'CELLO

O splendid voice, singing alone,
Restrained by trembling fingers,
Then given freely, warmly, fully.
Voice of the old brown wood—
Singing to the people,
Singing to dull ears
That cannot understand.
Wake now, rouse them,
Give them your meaning fully,
Give them war and strife—
Give them beauty growing out of strife,
Beauty that makes the heart ache,
Beauty that makes the heart break,
Then peace, a long, deep, final peace.

OBOE

But let that note be heard
Above the sound of strings—
The concert lights grow dim,
A sudden shadow brings
The spirit of dreaming woods,
Of moonlit glades that lie
Far, far from the ways of men
Beneath the quiet sky.

CLARINET

When the hot sun owns the earth and sky
And round fruit bends the trees,
When the harvesters leave the fields and lie
Full length in the slow winged breeze,
Then Jean joints up his clarinet
And pipes a reedy tune—
A dry little air and the time is set
To the heat of the harvest noon.
To the heat and the dust and the clustered vine
And the air of a sultry day,
To the glint of a distant water shine
And the smell of new mown hay.

BASS TUBA

I am the deep foundation,
Sounding brass;
Others pass,
I, I alone remain.
My great mouth flares above
The busy throng,
My heavy song
Goes burrowing far below.
My long vibrations hold,
Begin and break,
Descend and shake
The very walls of sound.

THE HARP

Obscured and dim, yet full of instant life—
A woman's instrument, that feels and knows
The tug of sorrow and the joy of strife,
The kiss of lovers and the clash of foes.

CYMBALS

The cymbals whispered—hush—
They said that—
Hush—
The great brass disks
That should have clashed,
That should have shattered silence,
Hush, hush—they said—
And silence came.

FANTASY

Oh, sweet irrelevance of flowing sound,
Of music that will wander without stay
Over the world and under the world at play—
Oh, voices lost and of a sudden found,
That will not follow, will not yet be bound;—
Music of dawn and of the dying day;—
Music of color, green and blue and gray;
Voices of air and of the sun-warmed ground.

What instrument shall form you, what red lips
Can sing your quick withdrawal and the shy
Renewal of your loveliness? What time
Can beat for you whose changing rhythm trips
And glides, whose magic words so swiftly fly
They will not bear the fairy weight of rhyme?

PRIDE

Musician with your pride of tone,
Your joy of rushing speed,
Your multitudinous notes,
Splendor of great passage,
Decorations light as air—
Be not proud—
For the poet too may sing.
Here and there
Some shining broidery of rhyme,
Some cadenced word of human speech
Obscures your flying measures.
All your splendid themes,
Your fine elaborations fail
Before that magic word.

Poet with your breathing loveliness of words,
The flute and viol of your flowing speech,
Be not too proud, too sure of mastery—
What words of yours can match the sunrise;
When moonlight speaks, your vaunted words are dumb.

Sea, air, sky and velvet valley,
Sunlit peak and spreading river,
Be not proud, be not certain of your mastery.
There is in touch of hand,
In curve of brow, in lips that speak no word,
More of beauty, more of light, more of heaven,
Than ever yet was known or can be known elsewhere.
All the joy of life may sing
In one swift glance of love.

MARCHE FUNEBRE

I must have youth beside me when they play
Music of sorrow, youth that does not know
The weight of sorrow. Steady and deep and slow
The great march. Now the silent soldiers sway
Rhythmically, heavily, down the peopled way.
Loss, unending loss, the trumpets blow,
Keen, keen the blending measures grow—
A brave soul marches to the grave today.

Stand closer, youth, brave youth with unbowed head.
Your spirit shall be mine, your courage mine,
Though tightening heart and sudden indrawn breath
Pay tribute to this music of the dead.
In the clear distance, down the lengthening line
The trumpets sing of triumph over death.

FLAME SONG

Flame!

What else shall I call you—

Girl of the song?

Flame!

How the orchestral branches sway

Like trees in the wind.

The fire of your song

Mounts up and up

Above the branches—

Consuming, leaping,

Failing, falling,

Till embers alone remain.

NOVAES

Suddenly I knew that this young girl—
Playing old music, great music
With ease and brilliance—
Was doing the incredible.
I knew that she had somehow passed
A vague and mystic bound,
That she was over, well over,
Into the realms of enchantment.
Without effort, without sign,
Perhaps without knowing it herself,
She had crossed the border—
She was no longer playing the piano,
She was dreaming—she was free.

PRELUDE

I would have this music played
With players grouped about a fountain—
Here the violins,
There the 'cellos,
Double bass beyond—
And back, half hidden by the fountain bowl,
The flute, an oboe and a long bassoon.

A thin, smooth water jet
Uprises,
Wavers,
Holds,
Breaks brightly at the top
And falls—a silver shower.

Ready, bows and reeds,
Ready, flute—

Well played—

Now you have heard and seen,
Tell me which was motion,
Which was sound,
The fountain or the flute—
And was the pizzicato done with strings
Or dropping water?

INTERMEZZO

The water jet falls lower, lower—
Ceases.
The sliding bows are still.
Rhythm cancels rhythm,
Nothing stirs—
And yet upon the soundless air
Steals out with fairy shyness
Something words may not disclose—
A soft andante muted down
Until it seems
The very voice of silence.

FINALE

Wake now and let the fountain wake—
Forget the dream,
Think now of life and motion.
A sheaf of streams leaps upward,
Mingles,
Falls to rise again, again,
While charmed voices
Intricately sing.
A gleaming discord strikes one dagger thrust
And goes.
The crossed themes fly,
They break, recover—
Under all
The great slow bass
Spreads out a deep'ning shadow
Till the hush of twilight comes,
Until the slow, slow pace
That lurks in every tempo swift
Comes to its own.

The water sheaf
Becomes a single slender shaft again—
Falls lower, lower,
Sinks at last
Into the fountain bowl.

PART III

Tree, You Are a Shadow

TREE, YOU ARE A SHADOW

Tree, you are a shadow,
Hooded with night.
I think of hands,
Folded in a black cloak,
A head bent low.
You do not stir,
You do not speak.
Tree, you are a shadow,
Ominous and still.
You are aloof,
You are mysterious.
Do you delight
In the fireflies that dance above your roots,
Are you amused
By the sudden, shivering cry,
The screech owl cry
That you and I were expecting?
I feel your aloofness,
And your mystery,
But I am not afraid.
Tree, you are a shadow,
Hooded with night.

Is it birdsong or light that awakes me,
Or the rustle of wind in the leaves?
The night is gone
And the shadows are gone.
Ah, my tree—
As the sap goes mounting skyward,

In your strong trunk,
As your great branches sway in the air and the light
So life comes back to me
And I feel,
Vaguely but surely as you must feel,
The courage and the will to live.

THE HEARTH FIRE

Steadily the fire played
Upon the old heart of the wood.
The great log slept in cool disdain.
Over the iron bark and strong, split surfaces
The insistent flames made myriad designs.
A soft blue smoke kept rising, rising.
Suddenly it came—the conflagration—
The strong old wood gave way
In a hundred places
And fire leaped from its heart.

TREE-TOPS IN A STORM

They rise and tug like leashed balloons—
Up and down, side to side—
Formless, green-black, leaping masses—
Opening, closing, spreading, folding,
Streaming with the rain.

MOON MOTH

Darkly,
Brightly,
Wings of moonlight gleaming—
Sailing,
Drifting,
Moon moth.

Swiftly,
Slowly,
Less than shadow seeming—
Silver,
Nothing,
Moon moth.

SCARF DANCE

Dance!

For the fairy folk are dancing now.

Dance!

The fairy folk will show you how.

Great folk are dancing,

Elf folk are prancing,

Come now,

Come make your bow.

Come now, come out upon the moonlit green,

Silk scarfs are flowing in a moonlit sheen,

Great folk are dancing,

Elf folk are prancing,

Come now,

Come make your bow.

Moon music flowing with a soundless sound,

Tip toes just touching on the dancing ground

Dance!

To the fairy music bend your knees,

Dance!

For the wind is in the bending trees—

Come now

Come make your bow.

FIRE FLY DANCE

Under the drooping elms the night is dark: the meadow seems lighter as though a fine mist were lying on the grass: in the deep shade of the trees a tiny greenish yellow star begins to glide back and forth in a short arc—this way, that way, disappearing in the darkness at each end of the swing. It is the baton of the fairy leader; it is the signal for the dance. Suddenly the tree toads and the frogs begin to pipe:

Whee—
The lantern dance.

Winking
Linking
Bright
Glow the elfin light

Blinking
Sinking
Dark
Goes each shining spark.

Over the wide meadow the dance goes on; groups of lantern dancers hold the stage left, right and centre. Suddenly then, the whole stage glows with the ensemble:

Winking
Linking
Now
Pirouette and bow.

Blinking
Sinking
Done
Off stage, off stage they run.

A dog barks in the distance—the frogs and tree toads stop their piping for a moment, while in the darkness the stage is set for the next act, which is the Dance of Moon Beams. Slowly the meadow lightens. The moon appears from behind a heavy cloud bank. The piping begins in a lower, slower movement:

Softly—
The Dance of the Moon Beams.

CLOG DANCE

Clap
Rap
Slap-slap-ker-slap,
Heel rap,
Toe slap,
Heel rapping,
Toe slapping,
Now they are clipping it,
Speeding up, slipping it,
Off in the whirl of it,
Caught in the skirl of it.
Pipers are puffing it,
Drummers are ruffing it,
Quick fiddles scratching it,
Sharp fifer catching it,
Keep it up, make it go,
Keep it up heel and toe—
On till the drummer drags,
On till the fifer lags,
Clap,
Rap,
Slap-slap--ker-slap.

SNOW

Soft flakes light as air
Sweep,
Creep,
Across the quiet fields;
Slowly whiten the meadow,
Fly,
Lie,
Cover the green of the world.
Gray skies hold back the storm,
Hold
The cold.
Behind vast billowing curtains
The cloud-bound whirlwind waits.

MOONLIGHT

Straight overhead
A small, hard disk of silver
Set in blue.
The sky is empty :
Not a star may shine.
The moon-blanchèd land
Lies bleak and shadowless.

THE STONE TIGER

Four inches high he sits,
Small ears held flat,
His eyes two greenish slits
Drawn down slantwise.
The fanged jaws open wide—
Is it a yawn,
A silent roar of pride,
Or is it protest
At a world gone mad,
At life awry
And more than jungle bad?
He comforts me.

TIGER, TIGER

At night my stone smooth tiger glides
Across the silent room.
He's somewhere now, somewhere he hides
Within the bookish gloom.

Good hunting friend, the tangled brake
Of poets be your lair,
Crouch low behind my black bound Blake,
Crouch low, good tiger, glare.

Old Blake will know and welcome you
There in the shifty night,
But oh, whatever else you do,
Burn bright for him, burn bright.

THE ROAD

Tremulous patches of yellow light
Lying along the wheel-worn way
Fade and are gone as the whispering night
Speeds through the woods at close of day.

What of the road in the starlight dim
Pallid and still in a world of shade?
What of the road and what of him
Who follows its course through the wooded glade?

THE HAND

I saw it, I tell you—
A hand on the railing—
It came slowly
Out of the darkness.
The knuckles whitened
As though a weight were lifting—
I stood in the shadow,
Dared not move—
But the hand slid down slowly
And was gone.

THE PISTOL

The towering shadow of a man,
The round blue rim of a pistol—

Death!

But I leapt at him—

Crash—

The night flared red—

I, the coward,

I, the weakling—

Leapt—and won.

MIDNIGHT

Tick—Tock,
Rise, great moon, above the hill,
The dream-touched house is white and still,
Tick—Tock—
In a darkened room the hours pass:
Slowly, slowly through the glass
Tick—Tock,
The moonlight creeps across the floor,
Brightens the wall, the hearth, the door;
Tick—Tock—
Falls like snow in a windless place,
Reaches a quiet, sleeping face,
Tick—Tock—
No sound there is in the world tonight
But the old clock ticking left and right,
Tick—Tock.

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